SIM-City Social Work:
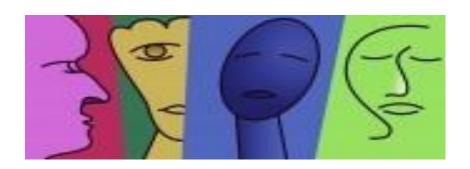

Graduated Practice Simulations for Advanced Social Work Professional Readiness

Newell Innovative Teaching Award Proposal
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**SIM-City Social Work: Graduated Practice Simulations for
Advanced Social Work Professional Readiness**

Description of the Project. The School of Social Work is dedicated to preparing

undergraduate and graduate students for excellence and professional readiness upon

graduation. Graduates must be competent in social work knowledge, skill, theory, and ethics if

they are to practice their craft without doing harm to vulnerable persons seeking professional

help. For professional readiness, students need maximum exposure to a wide field of case

types, ethical dilemmas, and circumstances they are likely to encounter in real-world practice.

Two social work professors were challenged with transforming a lecture-based

advanced practice graduate class (SW650-1/2) to that in which students were weekly

practicing their craft under instructor supervision. The challenge resulted in a paradigm shift

in thinking how social work can be taught across the undergraduate and graduate curriculum,

thus SIM-City Social Work was born.

SIM-City Social Work was enacted as a new model in the fall of 2012, beginning with

graduate students in advanced social work practice. Two faculty members, each assigned to

their own sections of the same course, collaborated to challenge students out of their comfort

zone from *passive* learning through traditional methods to face-to-face *interactive simulations*.

In the summer prior to the class, the two faculty members developed and produced

original videos of undergraduate social work students portraying client simulations in a

variety of complicated cases. In the fall, the instructors then combined their two course

sections bringing students together to view the video scenarios. They then created dyads

among students to continue the case simulations with one student in the "hot seat" as the

social worker, and as the other the client in distress (see Addendum 3, *The Haunting of Captain North*, for a summary description of one of the video-produced cases).

The instructors, with their classrooms in close proximity, observed and coached as students engaged in simultaneous simulations. Mid-term and final projects involved students developing and producing their own videotaped simulations showcasing specific social work skills. These projects were then performed live in Union's Little Theater as undergraduate social work students observed the simulations. Graduate simulations became a teaching loop-back of advanced practice for the undergraduates (see Addendums 1 and 2).

How the Project Differed. Critical course content for SW650 was relegated from in-class delivery to Moodlerooms online where student efforts were evaluated by weekly online quizzes. This strategy maximized time in class for simulations preparing students for professional social work practice; this significantly differed from the traditional methods in which the course was previously taught. For the first time simulation based learning was envisioned across the curriculum from undergraduate to graduate social work education.

Success and Future Improvements. Instructors noted how initial student nervousness and trepidation, in response to the high level of faculty coaching, turned into great energy, curiosity, and humor as the class progressed. Fear of failure and embarrassment gave way to curiosity and real learning, with the one exception of the student who ran out of class in a panic attack during an especially high-stressed simulation. Future plans include focused training for coping with stressful social work situations that will surely be experienced in real world practice (see Addendums 1 and 2).

Addendum 1: Logic Model for Learning Strategies in SIM-City Social Work

	SIM-City Learning Strategies: Year 1	Description of Strategies	Learning Impact for Professional Readiness
1	**Hybrid-assisted learning**	• Students are given the primary responsibility to acquire social work practice knowledge between classes through mandated engagement of weekly *online* lectures, readings, quizzes, forums, and discussions	• *Online learning* between classes maximizes opportunities for supervised social work practice simulations in class preparing students for professional practice
2	**Weekly in-class video-assisted practice simulations**	• Students practice specific social work skills *(e.g. establishing therapeutic alliance, contracting for services, assessment)* by responding to pre-recorded videos of clients *(played by undergraduate social work students)* that demonstrate problems brought to the social worker for help. *(For description of a recorded simulation, see Addendum 3: **The Haunting of Captain North**)*	• Weekly engagement in diverse, simulated client cases increases students' confidence, competence, and readiness for real-world practice.
3	**One-on-one/real-time coaching**	• Instructors observe each interaction, encouraging, and constructively coaching students for correction and skill enhancement. • Mistakes are welcomed as heightened learning opportunities	• As students test their skills and various models of practice through simulated social work cases, learning needs are individually addressed by the instructors for professional development • Mistakes are constructively corrected in real-time to maximize learning
4	**Theater-in-the Round Mid-term Simulations**	• By lottery drawing, students form into dyads or triads to develop their own social work case scenario that demonstrates specific skills • Student-developed simulations are filmed by the instructors to be shown later in class for self-observation of skill enactment • Simulations are performed in Union's Little Theater with undergraduate student observers	• Professional social work practice begins to be modeled to undergraduate social work students through observation of simulations • Graduate students demonstrate readiness for professional social work practice through simulation
5	**High-stakes Final Simulation**	• Individual students write an evaluation and intervention in response to live simulations for high-stakes final grade	• Students prove readiness for professional skills by advanced practice responses
	Year 2 Learning Enhancements	Description of Strategies	Learning Impact for Professional Readiness
6	**Continue strategies initiated in Year 1**	• Routinize involvement of undergraduate social work students in observing, and then participating in simulations with graduate students • Freshmen & sophomore social work student begin to learn what professional social work practice looks like as they observe simulations enacted between upper class undergraduates & graduate students	• For student observers, expectations for professional practice begin to be modeled. • As these student progress into their junior and senior years, they participate as clients in simulations with graduate students, thus "walking in the shoes of a client"
7	**Utilization of simulation-lab, Providence Hall**	• Use of simulation lab for live simulations with undergraduate social work students in the role of clients & graduate students in social worker roles	• Simulation lab furthers the illusion of real social work practice thus enhancing professional readiness

SIM-City Social Work:
Graduated Simulations from
Low-Stakes Observation to High-Stakes Professional Readiness

STAGE 5.
PROFESSIONAL READINESS for Social Work Practice

STAGE 1.
LOW-STAKES OBSERVATION
1st and 2nd year undergraduate social work students observe simulations

STAGE 4.
SYNTHESIS of social work practice knowledge, skill, theory, and ethics

STAGE 3.
HIGH-STAKES PARTICIPATION
Graduate social work students participate in simulations as *social workers*

STAGE 2.
LOW-STAKES PARTICIPATION
3rd and 4th year undergraduate students participate in simulations as *clients*

Addendum 2